

Strategic Planning: The Roadmap to a Successful Future

EXECUTIVE PLANNING

By: Douglas Lautner
Assistant Chief
Department of the Air Force
Mercury, Nevada

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ABSTRACT

Where do we want to go? How will we get there? What do our customers want from us? Fire service leaders who see the need to create a vision, and anticipate the future needs of their organizations and customers, will have to answer those questions and many more. Strategic planning offers the means by which to answer those questions. The problem that prompted this project was that the Range Complex Fire Department does not have a strategic plan for the future. The purpose of this project was to evaluate the perceptions of rank and file personnel and senior officers on strategic planning, mission and vision statements, and to determine if a strategic plan is necessary for the future of the department. The descriptive and evaluative research methodologies were used. The research questions were:

1. Are personnel familiar with the department's mission statement?
2. Do fire department personnel feel that a vision statement would provide a sense of direction for the department and themselves?
3. Do senior officers feel that a strategic plan is necessary for the future of the department?
4. Would rank and file personnel be willing to participate in the planning process?

A literature review and two interviews were conducted to gain insight into strategic planning. Sixty-five survey instruments were used to measure fire department personnel's perceptions on strategic planning, and to answer the questions raised for this research project.

The results of this study identified that fire department personnel are not familiar with the department's mission statement. Personnel do feel that a vision statement would provide a sense of direction for themselves and the department. Senior officers feel that a strategic plan is necessary for the future of the department. Rank and file personnel would be willing to participate in the planning process.

The recommendations were: That, this project be made available to all senior officers as soon as possible, and that the department embark on a strategic planning effort. The chief should lead the effort to develop a meaningful mission and vision statement. Senior officers should review their communication and human resource management practices. Senior officers should take advantage of the rank and file's willingness to participate in the strategic planning process.

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INTRODUCTION

Where do we want to go? How will we get there? What do our customers want from us? Fire service leaders, who see the need to create a vision for their organizations and customers, will have to answer those questions and many more. With rapidly changing environments and ever-increasing demands for services by our customers, coupled with decreasing operating budgets, senior officers are increasingly forced, as a matter of survival, to change the way they conduct business.

Fire service leaders can take a cue from the business community. Nearly all successful businesses have one thing in common: A strategic plan for the future. Successful business leaders create broad visions and meaningful missions. They tailor their plans to anticipate the future needs of their customers, as well as, to make more efficient uses of resources.

Business leaders create success by recognizing that everyone in their organizations, as well as the customers they serve, has something of value to offer in order to make the organization successful. Involvement by everyone within the organization is a key ingredient to a successful plan.

Successful businesses monitor both their internal and external environments and take a proactive posture in anticipating and making the changes necessary to ensure successful futures. Unsuccessful organizations find themselves reacting to changes already occurring around them.

At one time or another most senior fire officers have heard varying reasons for not embarking on a strategic plan for the future. Comments such as, “We just don’t have the time”, “We’re doing OK without a plan”, “It will just collect dust on the chiefs shelf”, and “No plan survives reality”, are commonly heard.

The above statements are not surprising given that the fire service is an action-oriented profession; actions get results. Unfortunately, many times we skip the planning and go straight to action, and then get frustrated that the action may not achieve the desired results. Success in accomplishing improved productivity, greater efficiency, or better service, does and will, depend on how well senior management conveys to everyone in the organization their vision of where the organization will be in the distant future. Strategic planning is the roadmap by which to achieve that vision.

Fire service personnel are our most valuable resource. The problem that prompted this research project is that the Range Complex Fire Department (RCFD) does not have a strategic plan for the future. The purpose of this project was to evaluate the perceptions of both senior officers and rank and file personnel on strategic planning and

mission and vision statements, and to determine if a strategic plan is necessary for the future of the department. The descriptive and evaluative research methodologies were used to answer the following questions:

1. Are personnel familiar with the department's mission statement?
2. Do fire department personnel feel that a vision statement would provide a sense of direction for the department and themselves?
3. Do senior officers feel that a strategic plan is necessary for the future of the department?
4. Would rank and file personnel be willing to participate in the planning process?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The idea for this project was inspired by a viewing of the film "The Last Place on Earth", and participation on a team project. Both activities were conducted during the Executive Planning course as part of the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy. The film was shown in one-hour increments throughout the course, and was based on two expeditionary teams from different countries vying to become the first people to reach the South Pole.

The film compared and contrasted both teams planning efforts and identified their successes and failures based upon how each team planned for their journeys. While viewing the film it was obvious that one team was proactive in their planning efforts, involving the entire team and anticipating future problems. The unsuccessful team's autocratic leader disregarded input from team members who had anticipated future problems. Because of the lack of input, and failure to anticipate change, the unsuccessful team was forced to react to changes and problems that could have been anticipated.

During the team exercise, students were placed in groups and assigned to plan a project. The development of mission and vision statements was an integral part of the exercise. While viewing the film and participating in the exercises it became evident to the author that the RCFD did not have a strategic plan for the future. The department also has a history of being reactive rather than proactive to the changing organizational environment in which it exists. It does have a mission statement, but lacks a vision statement. It was decided that utilizing survey instruments would be a good way of determining if RCFD personnel are familiar with the departments mission statement, and if senior officers felt a strategic plan was necessary for the future of the department.

Two factors helped influence this project: First, in March of 1999, the question of whether the department's fire-log/reports management information system was Y2K compatible was asked. This system was utilized for the department's dispatch log, as well as for tracking for all department related information systems. The answer was that the system was not Y2K compatible. The Deputy Chief and the department's Comm/Data officer were put in charge of purchasing and implementing the new program.

A new system was purchased in June of 1999, with an implementation date of October 1, 1999. To date, the new system has not been fully implemented throughout the department. Currently there are two significant problems associated with the system. Due to the large geographical area of the range complex, the department is divided into two divisions. The team failed to arrange or budget for the secure fiber required to run the system in the "Northern" division of the department, which has prompted the use of an in-house developed log system that is not integrated with the "Southern" division of the department.

Additionally, the team failed to solicit input from the personnel that would be using system. This lack of input has led to a failure of the new system to provide man-hour totals that are essential for the department's data collection efforts. Also, training on the new system is progressing more slowly than had been anticipated. The new system requires several additional steps that were not required under the old system. Because of the above-mentioned oversights, implementation of the system and training of personnel in the northern division will not be accomplished until the end of the year.

The second factor influencing this project involves the budget of the RCFD. For as long as the author has been employed by the department, one person has administered the budget. Currently, as with most departments, the RCFD is operating on smaller budgets than last year, excluding salaries. Because of the lack of input there have been several unexpected expenditures that exceed the amount of the yearly budget. Many of these expenditures could have been anticipated with proper planning and input from members of each division within the department. When additional funds are needed, senior executives require lengthy justification, and in many instances, the funds are not expended because of the lack of foresight on the department's part.

The future impact of the department's unwillingness to change how it conducts its business is that the RCFD will continue to encounter problems budgeting and implementing vital programs. A continued lack of foresight in the area of planning and program implementation could lead to the perception that the department leaders are not capable of efficiently managing their resources. Also, it is conceivable that if major changes are not

implemented with regard to the department budget, senior executives may feel it necessary to assign someone from outside the organization to take complete control of the process.

This project is necessary to satisfy the requirements of the Executive Fire Officer Program course titled “Executive Planning”. The project is directly related to Module 2: Project Leadership, and Module 4: Strategic Planning of the *Executive Planning* student manual, which relates to analysis, leadership, implementation and evaluation in strategic planning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review was intended to gain insight into strategic planning and to determine if the RCFD should embark on a strategic plan. The literature review is divided into three sections and addresses the issues raised by the research questions and RCFD surveys.

Strategic Planning

As fire service managers begin the new millennium, greater emphasis will continue to be placed on providing a leaner, more organized, and efficient organization. As in business, the customer, both internal and external, should be the primary focus, with an emphasis on improving customer satisfaction in the future.

Harrington and Harrington discuss the issue of the customer and the importance of focusing strategic planning to that end by stating:

The real purpose of strategic planning is to determine the external focus of your business in terms of customers served and value provided, along with identifying the areas in which the organization must excel in order to be successful. A well-crafted plan can provide the road map to success and let every individual know how they can contribute to the results. The planning process itself can be a great contributor to the development of new ideas and competitive insights, develop the process of buy-in and management commitment, and also be an integral part of the communications and mobilization effort (Harrington, Harrington, 1995, pp. 88, 89).

Bryson echoes and expands on Harrington and Harrington: “Strategic Planning can help facilitate communication and participation, accommodate divergent interests and values, foster wise and reasonably analytic decision making, and promote successful implementation” (Bryson, 1995, p. 5).

Wright continues the discussion on customer focus. “The best companies find out what’s happening with the people who are the key to their success, customers...and employee’s. They evaluate industry trends and analyze the competition” (Wright, 1999, p. 2). Wright continues: “They build a “Picture of the Future”, including new opportunities, challenges, and customer preference. The best organization’s strategic plans set a clear vision of success” (Wright, 1999, p. 2).

Cook expands on Wright’s discussion regarding customer service. Cook discusses the customer’s perception as the most important factor by stating, “The factor is the perception of the customer with regard to your firm, your products and your services” (Cook, 1995, p. xv).

Cook continues, “If the customer does not attribute to you superiority, then any perception you have of being superior is false” (Cook, 1995, p. xv). Expanding further, Cook states:

Through effective strategic planning, you develop the knowledge and skills that can lead you to competitive superiority. The process helps you identify and take advantage of customer requirements, marketplace conditions, and your capabilities in order to establish superiority not only in your mind, but also in the mind of customers (Cook, 1995, p. xv).

Strategic planning requires that organizational leaders develop a vision for their future. Wren succinctly makes the point stating: “Strategic Planning gives the guiding members of the organization an opportunity to envision the future and design the incremental steps to make that future a reality” (Wren, 1995, p. 77). Cook expands and continues the discussion: “Strategic planning helps you see beyond the present, and envision what you can be. More importantly, it helps you determine how to get there” (Cook, 1995, p. xvi).

The identification of goals and objectives based on the organizational vision is essential to achieve desired results. “Strategic planning is the process of determining the long-term vision and goals of an enterprise and how to fulfill them” (Bean, 1993, p. 13). Expanding, Marshall states, “...a formal strategic plan commits to paper goals and objectives that are understandable, measurable and achievable” (Marshall, 1999, p. 48). Strategic planning “...is the process by which the guiding members of an organization envision its future and develop the necessary procedures and operations to achieve that future” (Goodstein, Nolan, Pfeiffer, 1992, p. 1).

Plenert describes the planning process as goal based and identifies key areas, which an organization must define during the planning phase. “Core competencies, Vision, Mission, Strategy, and the Plan of Operation”

(Plenert, 1995, p-47). Bryson, in his book “*Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*”, expands on Plenert, identifying 10 steps necessary for successful strategic planning, and lists them as follows:

1. Initiate and agree upon a strategic planning process.
2. Identify organizational mandates.
3. Clarify organizational mission and values
4. Assess the organization’s internal and external environments to identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT).
5. Identify the strategic issues facing the organization.
6. Formulate strategies to manage these issues.
7. Review and adopt the strategic plan or plans.
8. Establish an effective organizational vision.
9. Develop an effective implementation process.
10. Reassess strategies and the strategic planning process (Bryson, 1995, p. 23).

In an interview conducted with Dr. Paul Tiffany, co-author of *Business Plans for Dummies*, Dr. Tiffany expressed the idea that Core values and SWOT analysis are a vital part of the planning process stating:

Core values are important because they identify the organization and its employee’s beliefs and guiding principles. Determining what those beliefs and principles are is critical in determining where the organization wants to go in the future. It is extremely important that everyone in the organization embrace the company values” (Dr. Paul Tiffany, telephone interview, February 15, 2000).

Wallace continues and expands on core values by stating:

The values of an organization comprise the system of beliefs that guides it in all it does. The “Value System” is an enduring organization of standards or principles that represents the preferred conduct or operational results of the department (Wallace, 1998, p-46).

DeGrosky in an article for *American Fire Journal* discusses the importance of core values, and expands on the discussion further by stating:

Guiding principles capture the essence of the organization’s philosophy. These few critical, core values should guide the day-to day behavior of everyone in the organization. Secondly, an organization’s guiding

principles provide the sideboard within which its workforce can flexibly and creatively pursue the organizations strategic vision (DeGrosky, 1999, p. 23).

During the telephone interview, Dr. Tiffany went on to discuss SWOT analysis and its importance to the planning process: “Strengths and weaknesses can’t be measured in a vacuum, you must take an honest look to determine what you’re good at, and what you need to improve upon” (Dr. Paul Tiffany, telephone interview, February 15, 2000). Wallace echoes Dr. Tiffany: “The planning team should ensure that the department’s strengths and weaknesses are evaluated openly, honestly and objectively” (Wallace, 1998, p. 87).

Cook expands on Tiffany and Wallace:

A SWOT analysis will help you develop an understanding of the environment in which you operate. It will help you balance your internal strengths and weaknesses against the opportunities and threats you face. By completing this analysis, you will take a major step towards defining your capabilities and the competitive advantages available to you (Cook, 1995, p. 6).

Dr. Tiffany emphasized the ramifications of failing to have a strategic plan. During the telephone interview, Dr. Tiffany stated: “Not having a strategic plan places the organization in reactive rather than proactive mind-set where the organization is constantly reacting to changes around them rather than being proactive and anticipating change” (Dr. Paul Tiffany, telephone interview, February 15, 2000). Wallace echoes Dr. Tiffany: “If we do not create a proactive posture, we will have to be reactive to the changes that are occurring continually. Always having to react to changes forced on us is frustrating and dysfunctional” (Wallace, 1998, p. 42).

Dr. Tiffany also expands on failing to plan, and how this failure can affect resource allocations. “If an organization has no plan, how are they to know if they are allocating their resources effectively? The best organizations build plans to efficiently utilize and allocate their resources. Not having a plan is paramount to squandering those resources” (Dr. Paul Tiffany, telephone interview, February 15, 2000). Cook expands on Dr. Tiffany, continuing: “Resources are a precious commodity...you must use them wisely. Strategic planning helps you plan effectively for their use” (Cook, 1995, p. xviii).

Obolensky continues the discussion on what can be expected when an organization has no plan. “Documenting a detailed plan often is seen as a boring activity, but without it is the same as going into unknown territory without a map—it is very easy to get lost” (Obolensky, 1994, p. 56).

“A fire department that is not moving forward, working to create a better future, is dying or, at least, is in danger of dying” (Wallace, 1998, p. 42). Marshall echoes and expands on the points made by Obolensky and Wallace.

Without a strategic plan, a business will have little or no formal notion of where it going and will not be able to communicate its goals and objectives through the organization. But with a strategic plan, a company can translate these overall goals and objectives into accomplishable actions (Marshall, 1999, p. 47).

The literature review identified strategic planning as essential to an organization’s future successes. The review pointed out that strategic planning should focus on the customer, as well as efficient resource allocation. Identifying strengths and weaknesses, and the organization’s core values, are critical elements in the planning process. The review also identified that those organizations without plans will tend to be reactive rather than proactive in changing environments.

Mission and Vision Statements

The organizational mission and vision statements are the most visible items of a strategic plan. They let both the internal and external customers know where the organization stands with regard to the direction or focus of the organization.

“A mission statement is a vital part of the planning process. It provides a “Guiding Star” to lead the department into its ideal future” (Wallace, 1998, p. 48). Tiffany and Peterson expand on the point made by Wallace, stating “...it is meant to communicate the purpose of your business to people both inside and outside the organization. It establishes who you are and what you do”. Continuing, Tiffany and Peterson go on to state: “The mission statement has to draw a compelling picture of what your business is all about” (Tiffany, Peterson, 1997, p. 21).

Goodstein, Nolan, and Pfeiffer identify key questions that need to be asked in developing an organizational mission statement.

In creating the mission statement, the following questions must be answered:

What, as in what goods and services, will be rendered?

Who, as in what segment of the customer base, is the organization’s primary target?

How, as in deciding how the organization will achieve its mission, quality, customer service, etc.?

And finally, why, as in establishing the reason for the organization’s existence (Goodstein, Nolan, Pfeiffer, 1992, p. 2).

Wren discusses the essence of the mission statement as well as the length of the statement by stating:

It's a good idea to keep the mission statement short, to make it easy to recall its essence if not its exact wording. It should define in broad strokes: what primary outcomes the agency hopes to achieve, who are its customers, and how outcomes will be achieved (Wren, 1995, p. 65).

Expanding on Wren, Obolensky goes on to state: "It is used not only to build more detailed objectives, initiatives, and projects, but also to remind employees (who cannot be expected to remember the details of the strategy) what the organization is trying to achieve" (Obolensky, 1994, p. 47). Cook expands on the point made by Obolensky. "The mission statement functions as a communication device. It communicates your intentions, your goals, and direction to the parties involved in your business" (Cook, 1995, p. 5). Wallace continues: "Once adopted it should be on prominent display throughout the department facilities and displayed prominently on all the department's major publications such as the strategic plan, the budget, and the annual report..." (Wallace, 1998, p. 48).

Harrington and Harrington complete the discussion on mission statements, discussing the issue in terms of winners and losers, by stating:

A good mission statement will require leadership and be externally focused with customers in mind and will serve as a motivation "to be" or "to do". Winners make their missions short, clear, and compelling, while losers will have missions focused on shareholder value or some other non-customer, non-competitive emphasis (Harrington, Harrington, 1995, p-92).

Vision statements tend to be much broader in scope than mission statements, and focus primarily on the future of organizations. Hultman contrasts mission and vision by stating: "A mission defines an organization or team's purpose and is related to why we exist. A vision describes a desired future state that would fulfill the mission statement" (Hultman, 1998, p. 156).

Nanus describes the vision in much broader terms, stating:

A vision is a realistic, credible, attractive future for your organization. It is your articulation of a destination toward which your organization should aim a future that in important ways is better, more successful, or more desirable for your organization than is present.

A vision is only an idea or an image of a more desirable future for the organization, but the right vision is an idea so energizing that it in effect jump-starts the future by calling forth the skills, talents, and resources to make it happen. (Nanus, 1992, p. 8)

Continuing, Nanus goes on to say, “The vision calls out to everyone in the organization: this is what we see as our distinctive competence, this is what we stand for, and this is where we’re going” (Nanus, 1992, p. 17). Planert takes the discussion further by stating: “A vision is an enterprise’s sense of purpose, its reason for being, its guiding philosophy. A vision builds unity throughout the organization. The vision should provide employees with a clear image with which they can identify” (Planert, 1995, p. 8).

In their book, *The 21st Century Organization*, Bennis and Mische discuss and identify what the vision must do for the organization. “The vision must:

Be sweeping and bold, stressing quantum rather than incremental results.

Create a sense of energy, passion, and commitment rather than anxiety, panic, and intimidation. Be realistic and achievable, serving as a guide for all organizational activity (Bennis, Mische, 1995, p. 45).

Rosen expands on Bennis and Mische, continuing:

Everyone in the organization needs to believe in the vision. It can’t be vague, and it can’t be simple to achieve. Not only must the vision inspire people; it must stretch them as well. It is the guiding light that leads the organization forward (Rosen, 1996, p. 29).

The review was important in identifying how the mission statement ties into the vision of the organization, answering the questions of who you are, what you do and how you do it, as well as why the organization exists. The review also identified that the vision statement is the “Guiding Light” focussing the organization and its members on the attainment of a successful future.

Participation

Involving employees from start to finish in any program has always been considered good management practice. Strategic planning is no different.

In an article by Matt Stevens titled, “How to Prepare for an Uncertain Future”, the involvement of employees is discussed, and how by involving them, the organization can increase its ability to shape the future.

Drawing on and utilizing the knowledge, creativity and power of front line staff, customers, suppliers, managers, and strategic partners, higher quality information make more effective strategies and better

decisions. Therefore, more effective implementation and greater “Buy In” are achieved. By bringing diverse people with multiple perspectives together to focus on organizational learning and analysis of the future, businesses increase their capacity to shape the future (Stevens, 1999, p. 2).

When initiating any change project it is important to remember that most people in the organization will focus on how the change will affect them personally. Hultman discusses how leaders who involve everyone gain support, while leaders who go it alone will have difficulties. Hultman goes on to state:

It is common knowledge that people will be more supportive of change if they are involved in the decision making. The issue is determining whom the change belongs to. If you make the decision without involving those who will be affected by it, the change belongs to you. If the change or plan is not successful, therefore, the future also belongs to you. If you involve those who will be affected in decision making, the change belongs to everyone. People will more readily commit themselves to changes that belong to them and since they have a stake in the results, they will be more motivated to insure that the change is a success (Hultman, 1998, p. 173).

Rosen expands on the point made by Hultman, stating:

The best leaders know that a vision with a single voice never amounts to much, so they share the vision across the organization, enlisting the input and participation of all employees. By letting everyone shape the vision, the leader inspires people and builds commitment (Rosen, 1996, p. 29).

In an article for *American Fire Journal*, DeGrosky discusses the positive impact of strategic planning and the participation by people in the organization by stating: “Today, progressive organizations have rediscovered the value of strategic planning. They employ more democratic processes that tap the knowledge, experience and talents of people within the organization and its stakeholders” (DeGrosky, 1999, p. 23). Continuing and expanding, DeGrosky goes on to say, “If you want someone to be committed to your mission, committed to your vision or committed to your strategic plan, you must involve them in the development of these products” (DeGrosky, 1999, p. 23). “An implicit part of the strategic plan calls for using all the skills of everyone involved. Drawing on everyone’s creativity and resources is fundamental (Rosen, 1996, p. 153).

Wallace in his article “Strategic Planning: Creating Future Excellence, Part 1”, discusses the use of fire department employees and the idea that they are the best available at the time of their selection, and how utilizing them in the planning process is important by stating:

The people selected for those few positions are the brightest and most caring, educated and trainable idealists available. So, most fire departments have the expertise within their own organizations to create their ideal future, that vision of tomorrow, if they simply tap their resources more effectively (Wallace, 1998, p. 42).

Wallace expands the discussion further, continuing: "...empowerment is a critical step in the ability to use the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the personnel of the organization to create their own future" (Wallace, 1998, p. 42). Wallace continues, "This empowerment will create an effective, energized organization characterized by happy, healthy, productive, self-actualized individual's all working toward the achievement of the same mission, goals, and objectives" (Wallace, 1998, p. 42). Bennis and Mische complete the discussion by stating: "Employees who are involved...develop a profound sense of ownership that helps the organization achieve greater long-term growth" (Bennis, Mische, 1995, p. 13).

The review was important in identifying how involving all employees in a strategic planning effort can result in higher quality information, more effective strategies, and better decision making. The review also pointed out how increased commitment, or "buy in" on the part of the employees, can be achieved through the use of a participatory management style.

PROCEDURES

Literature Review Methodology

The first step in the research process was to locate any books, professional journals, and Executive Fire Officer (EFO) research papers related to strategic planning. An initial computer search was conducted in October 1999 at the Learning Resource Center located at the National Emergency Training Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland. A review of reference lists of EFO papers helped identify additional references not identified by the computer.

Computer searches were also conducted in January and February 2000, at the Clark County Public Library in Las Vegas, Nevada, and the National Emergency Training Center's Learning Resource Center on-line card catalog to locate additional material. The on-line card catalog was located on the World Wide Web (Internet), at the following electronic address: <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/lrc/>

Survey Methodology

Two survey instruments were used in preparation for this project. The two survey instruments were used to gauge the RCFD rank and file personnel (Appendix A), and senior officer's (Appendix B) perceptions on strategic planning, mission and vision statements. The rank and file personnel consisted of lieutenants and below. The senior officer's surveyed were station captains through the fire chief. A pilot survey was conducted on three firefighters. They were asked to review both surveys for mistakes. The firefighters indicated that the surveys were free of mistakes and understandable.

The rank and file survey consisted of two questions and three statements. The questions required a yes or no response, while the statements were multiple choice, using a scale that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Sixty-three surveys were distributed on January 21, 2000, with a return date of January 28, 2000. Fifty-two surveys were returned by the due date for a return rate of eighty-two percent.

The senior officer survey contained four questions requiring a yes or no response, and four statements that were multiple choice using a scale that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Thirteen surveys were distributed on January 21, 2000, with a return date of January 28, 2000. Thirteen surveys were returned by the due date for a return rate of one hundred percent.

Interview Methodology

Two interviews were conducted. The first interview was conducted by telephone on February 15, 2000. The purpose of the interview was to obtain background information on strategic planning, to discuss the results of the survey instruments, and to help identify recommendations for initiating strategic planning in the RCFD.

The person interviewed was Dr. Paul Tiffany. Dr. Tiffany is the managing director of Paul Tiffany & Associates, which offers management training and consulting services. Dr. Tiffany is also the co-author of the book *Business Plans for Dummies*, and an adjunct professor at the Haas School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley. Dr. Tiffany was contacted via the World Wide Web (Internet) at the following electronic address: tiffany@haas.berkeley.edu.

Dr. Tiffany was asked the following questions: What are some of the pitfalls of not having a strategic plan? What are the ramifications of employees not being aware of an organization's mission statement? Should all personnel throughout an organization be involved to some degree in the planning process? How do you feel about

involving all personnel in the development of mission and vision statements? In addition, Dr. Tiffany was asked general information questions regarding his area of expertise.

The second interview was conducted in person on March 8, 2000. The purpose of the interview was to obtain background information on the RCFD, discuss the results of the survey instruments, and to obtain the thought process on why a strategic plan has not been discussed or implemented in the RCFD. The person interviewed was Roland Benton, Fire Chief RCFD. Chief Benton has been the chief for the last 11 years.

Chief Benton was asked the following questions: Do you feel that not having a strategic plan has hindered the department's ability to anticipate future needs and customer requirements? Do you feel that the department is proactive with regard to both internal and external customers? Do you feel that the department has a clear understanding of where it needs to be in the future? Some of the chief officers have set goals and objectives for their respective shifts. Do you feel that the goals and objectives should be common throughout the department? In addition, Chief Benton was asked general information questions regarding his tenure as chief. Also discussed, were the results of both surveys.

Definition of Terms

Core Values: Intrinsic beliefs or philosophies within a company or organization.

Customer: An actual or prospective user or purchaser of a product or service.

Mission statement: An expression of a company or organization's goals, philosophies, customers, products, and services.

Opportunity: A situation that offers an organization the ability to grow and meet its goals.

Quality: A measure of the design and performance capabilities of a product or service, and how customers react to those capabilities.

Strategic plan: A disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it.

Strength: An asset of an organization that potentially could provide a competitive advantage.

SWOT analysis: An analysis that summarizes the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats an organization faces.

Threat: A situation that potentially hinders an organization's ability to grow and meet its needs.

Vision statement: A precise, well-crafted set of words announcing where your organization wants to go or painting a picture of what your organization wants to become.

Weakness: A liability of an organization that potentially could place it at a competitive disadvantage.

Limitations

Research articles were limited to books and journals published after 1992 in an attempt to keep the information presented as current as possible. Inexperience and a lack of training in interview and survey methodology may have hindered this project to some degree.

RESULTS

RCFD Survey Results

The first survey was conducted to gain insight into the rank and file personnel's perception on mission and vision statements, and to determine if personnel are familiar with the department mission statement. Question one of the rank and file survey asked, "Are you familiar with the departments mission statement?" Thirty-seven percent (19 of 52) indicated that they were familiar with the mission statement, while sixty-three percent (33 of 52) indicated they were not.

Question two asked, "Do you feel that a vision statement would provide you and the department with a sense of direction for the future?" Eighty-one percent (42 of 52) answered yes, while nineteen percent (10 of 52) answered no.

Statement three asked, "You are included in discussions on the future direction of the department." Four percent (2 of 52) strongly agreed. Eleven percent (6 of 52) somewhat agreed. Twenty-nine percent (15 of 52) agreed. Thirty-five percent (18 of 52) somewhat disagreed. Twenty-one percent (11 of 52) strongly disagreed.

Statement four asked, "You would be willing to participate in the planning process if asked." Thirty-five percent (18 of 52) strongly agreed. Twenty-three percent (12 of 52) somewhat agreed. Twenty-five percent (13 of 52) agreed. Nine percent (5 of 52) somewhat disagreed. Four percent (4 of 52) strongly disagreed.

Statement five asked, "All personnel should have the opportunity to provide input on the development of mission and vision statements." Forty-six percent (24 of 52) strongly agreed. Nineteen percent (10 of 52) somewhat

agreed. Fifteen percent (8 of 52) agreed. Six percent (3 of 52) somewhat disagreed. Fourteen percent (7 of 52) strongly disagreed.

The survey of the RCFD senior officers was conducted to gain insight into the senior officers' perception on mission and vision statements. The surveys were also used to determine if senior officers are familiar with the department's mission statement, and to determine if senior officers feel a strategic plan is important for the future of the department. Question one asked, "Are you familiar with the departments mission statement?" Seventy-seven percent (10 of 13) answered yes, while twenty-three percent (3 of 13) indicated they were not familiar with the mission statement.

Question two asked, "Were you involved in the development of the department mission statement?" Fifteen percent (2 of 13) answered yes, while eighty-five percent (11 of 13) answered no.

Question three asked, "Do you feel a vision statement would provide you and the department with a sense of direction for the future?" One hundred percent (13 of 13) felt a vision statement would provide a sense of direction for both the department and themselves.

Question four asked, "Are you familiar with the concept of strategic planning?" Again, one hundred percent (13 of 13) indicated that they were familiar with the concept of strategic planning.

Statement five asked, "A strategic plan is necessary of the department's future success." Forty-six percent (6 of 13) strongly agreed. Twenty-three percent (3 of 13) somewhat agreed. Eight percent (1 of 13) agreed. Eight percent (1 of 13) somewhat disagreed. Fifteen percent (2 of 13) strongly disagreed.

Statement six asked, "Rank and file personnel should be involved in the planning process." Thirty-eight percent (5 of 13) strongly agreed. Twenty-three percent (3 of 13) somewhat agreed. Eight percent (1 of 13) agreed. Eight percent (1 of 13) somewhat disagreed. Twenty-three percent (3 of 13) strongly disagreed.

Statement seven asked, "Rank and file personnel should have input into the development of mission and vision statements." Forty-six percent (6 of 13) strongly agreed. Fifteen percent (2 of 13) somewhat agreed. Eight percent (1 of 13) agreed. Eight percent (1 of 13) somewhat disagreed. Twenty-three percent (3 of 13) strongly disagreed.

Statement eight asked, "You include rank and file personnel in discussions on the future direction of the department." Fifty-four percent (7 of 13) somewhat agreed. Fifteen percent (2 of 13) agreed. Twenty-three percent (3 of 13) somewhat disagreed. Eight percent (1 of 13) strongly disagreed.

Interview Results

Dr. Tiffany, co-author of *Business Plans for Dummies*, was interviewed for this project. Results from the interview were used in the literature review and discussion sections of this project.

The first question asked of Dr. Tiffany was, “What are some of the pitfalls of not having a strategic plan?” Dr. Tiffany’s response was that most organizations without a plan tend to be reactive rather than proactive to changes both inside and outside the organization. Dr. Tiffany also stated that without a plan it is difficult to evaluate your organization in terms of how well are you providing customers with what they need and want from the organization. Also mentioned, was that without a plan, it is most likely you will not be utilizing the organization’s resources effectively.

The second question asked was, “What are the ramifications of employees not being aware of the organizations mission statement?” Dr. Tiffany spoke of organizational members pursuing action detrimental to the organization, such as, “pushing their own agendas”. Dr. Tiffany went on to state that either not knowing or not having a mission statement can compromise quality because there aren’t general organizational goals. The mission statement is a valuable tool in getting everyone on the “same page”.

The third question was, “Should all personnel throughout the organization be involved to some degree in the planning process?” Dr. Tiffany answered yes to this question, and explained that the more one communicates down the chain, the better understanding people will have of what is being achieved. All personnel should be involved in some form. Workgroups tend to work best in brainstorming of ideas. Dr. Tiffany went on to explain the workers can identify what is wrong and how to do it better. Dr. Tiffany also went on to explain that the lower the level of input and participation, the more filters you remove from the process, which allows for commitment and “buy in”.

The last question asked was, “How do you feel about involving all personnel in the development of mission and vision statements?” Dr. Tiffany stated that this could be a chaotic process. However, it is very important to allow personnel at the lowest level to be involved in the development of both the mission and vision statements. Development of the mission and vision should be a bottom up process, and is best done in small work groups, with top management making the final decisions.

Chief Roland Benton is the Fire Chief for the RCFD, and is a graduate of the National Fire Academy’s Executive Fire Officer Program. Results from this interview were used in the discussion section of this project.

The first question asked of Chief Benton was, “Do you feel that not having a strategic plan has hindered our ability to anticipate future needs and customer requirements?” Chief Benton's reply was that yes, to some degree the department's ability has been hindered because of the lack of a clearly articulated plan. Chief Benton went on to state that he did have a strategic plan, but felt that the organizational climate was such that he could not articulate his plan throughout the organization. Chief Benton added that the chief officers in the organization are now at a higher professional level, making the development of a strategic plan a viable option.

The second question asked was, “Do you feel that the department is proactive with regard to both internal and external customers?” Chief Benton replied by stating that the department could improve in this area. The chief again stated that the organizational climate was not conducive to being proactive. When asked to expand, the chief stated that he viewed his tenure in three segments, with the organization improving slightly during each segment to the point where he now feels the department can be proactive with regard to both internal and external customers.

The third question asked was, “Do you feel that the department has a clear understanding of where it needs to be in the future?” The chief replied by stating that in his mind he does feel that the department is heading in the right direction. The chief spoke of a gradual change from tactical planning to strategic planning. Chief Benton again alluded to the organizational climate as the main reason for not articulating his plan for the future.

The last question asked was, “Some of the chief officers have set goals and objectives for their respective shifts. Do you advocate this philosophy, or do you feel that the goals and objectives should be common throughout the department?” Chief Benton replied by stating that the setting of goals and objectives is a good way to evaluate the respective shifts. The chief now feels that the organizational environment is in place to establish department wide goals. The chief went on to state that the time is right to undertake a collective effort.

Answers to Research Questions

1. Are personnel familiar with the department's mission statement?

Answer:

No. The survey of rank and file personnel indicated that sixty-three percent (33 of 52) were not aware of the department mission statement. The senior officer survey indicated that twenty-three percent (3 of 13) were also not aware of the department's mission statement. When combining both surveys, fifty-five percent of those surveyed were unaware of the department's mission statement.

2. Do personnel feel that a vision statement would provide a sense of direction for the future and themselves?

Answer

Yes. The results of both the rank and file and senior officer surveys indicated that a vision statement would provide a sense of direction for both the department and themselves. Eighty-one percent (42 of 52) of the rank and file answered yes, while a full one hundred percent (13 of 13) of the senior officers surveyed also answered yes to this question. The literature also identified that a vision statement helps to provide a clear direction for an organization and its members.

3. Do senior officers feel that a strategic plan is necessary for the future of the department?

Answer:

Yes. Seventy-seven percent (10 of 13) of the senior officers strongly agreed, somewhat agreed, or agreed that a strategic plan was necessary for the future of the RCFD. The research also indicated that strategic planning is a useful tool in the attainment of a successful future.

4. Would rank and file personnel be willing to participate in the planning process?

Answer:

Yes. Results of the rank and file survey indicated that eighty-three percent (42 of 52) strongly agreed, somewhat agreed, or agreed that they would be willing to participate in the planning process. Research indicates that participation by all members of an organization helps to build commitment and buy-in by organizational members.

DISCUSSION

Where do we want to go? How do we will get there? What do our customers want from us? Fire service leaders, who see the need to create a vision for their organizations and customers, will have to answer those questions and many more. With a rapidly changing environment and ever-increasing demands for services by our customers, coupled with decreasing operating budgets, senior officers are increasingly forced, as a matter of survival, to change the way they conduct business.

The literature review identified the benefits of developing and adopting a strategic plan for the future. The results of this study identified that one hundred percent (13 of 13) of the senior officers surveyed feel that a strategic plan is necessary for the future of the department. It is interesting to note that during the interview with Chief

Benton, the chief indicated that the organizational climate has not been conducive to strategic level planning. "It was important to play things close to the vest. This was in response to fears that any involvement by certain individuals might lead to sabotage of the process" (Roland Benton, personal interview, March 8, 2000). However, when told of the results of the survey, the chief stated that he was encouraged by the findings.

However, Dr. Tiffany, felt that involving everyone in the process would help to achieve "buy in". By not at least trying to include all personnel, the department passed up a golden opportunity to at least answer the question, "How do we know we won't be successful if we don't try?" "The fact that your department has not embarked on a strategic plan is not unusual. Dr. Tiffany stated, "It is probably the main reason why your organization has experienced problems implementing change" (Dr. Paul Tiffany, telephone interview, February 15, 2000). Bennis and Mische echo Dr. Tiffany by stating, "Employees who are involved...develop a profound sense of ownership that helps the organization achieve greater long-term growth" (Bennis, Mische, 1995, p. 13).

Another interesting aspect of the study is that one hundred percent (13 of 13) of the senior officers surveyed, and eighty-one percent (42 of 52) of rank and file personnel felt that a vision statement would provide both themselves and the department with a sense of direction for the future. The results from this question indicate that the department as a whole understands the value of a meaningful vision.

Bennis and Mische discuss some warning signs that an organization may lack vision, such as: "Being unable to produce a clear vision statement or clear objectives. Focusing on specific departments rather than on cross-functional tasks" (Bennis, Mische, 1995, p. 13). The warning signs listed above are certainly indicative of what has occurred, and is continuing to take place, in the RCFD. The background section of this project is just a small sampling of what occurs on a regular basis in the department. "The vision should provide employees with a clear image with which they can identify" (Planert, 1995, p. 48).

The surveys provided interesting results with regard to the department's mission statement as well. When asked if respondents were aware of the department's mission statement, sixty-three percent (33 of 52) of the rank and file, and twenty-three percent of the seniors officers, were found to not be aware of the mission statement. The mission statement is located just outside of the chief's office, where there is not a lot of foot traffic. This, coupled with the statement not being formally presented to department members, has probably been the major contributing factor for a lack of awareness on the part of RCFD members.

The senior officer survey indicated that only two personnel actually were involved in the development of the mission statement. Without involvement by the organization as a whole, how can any organization expect awareness by its members? How can management expect “buy in” from all of its organization? Wren discusses the development of a mission statement by one person, by stating “... a mission statement written by the chief in isolation, without input from others, will always be just the chief’s mission” (Wren, 1995, p. 65). Interestingly, when discussing the results of both surveys with the chief, Chief Benton accepted some of the responsibility for the lack of awareness of the mission statement. He added, however, “The senior officers must also accept their share of responsibility as well” (Roland Benton, personal interview, March 8, 2000).

The literature review validated the involvement of all personnel in an organization when planning strategically. The senior officers in the RCFD appear to agree. Sixty-nine percent (9 of 13) either strongly agreed, somewhat agreed, or agreed that rank and file personnel should be involved in the planning process. Sixty-nine percent (9 of 13) of the senior officers also feel that rank and file personnel should be involved in the development of organizational mission and vision statements. The results of the study would tend to validate Chief Benton’s assertion that, “the organizational climate has improved to the point where we can now focus on strategic planning” (Roland Benton, personal interview, March 8, 2000).

Finally, statement three of the rank and file survey asked if personnel were included in discussions on the future direction of the department. Fifty-six percent (29 of 52) either somewhat or strongly disagreed with this statement. This finding is in direct contrast to the senior officer survey, which asked, “You include rank and file personnel in discussions on the future direction of the department?” Sixty-nine percent (9 of 13) either somewhat agreed, or agreed, that rank and file were included in discussions on the departments future direction.

It is obvious from the surveys that the rank and file personnel feel that they are not sufficiently involved. Lack of awareness of the department’s mission statement, coupled with their perception that they are not involved in discussions on the future direction of the department, indicates that senior officers must do a better job in involving all personnel in change projects.

The study identified that involvement by all personnel in the planning process is essential if the organization itself to be successful. The research also validated strategic planning as the road map by which future organizational success can be attained.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The problem that prompted this research project is that the RCFD does not have a strategic plan for the future. The purpose of this project was to evaluate the perceptions of rank and file and senior officers on strategic planning, mission and vision statements, and to determine if a strategic plan is necessary for the future of the department. Based on the results of this project the following recommendations are offered.

This study should be made available to all senior officers as soon as possible. Senior officers should plan to plan strategically. The results of the study clearly indicated that this course was the direction senior officers felt was necessary for the future of the department. Research clearly indicated that strategic planning was critical to attaining success in the future.

The chief should lead the effort to develop a meaningful mission and vision statement for the department. Survey results indicated that the majority of RCFD personnel felt this step was important in gaining a sense of direction for both themselves and the department. The research identified the utilization of all personnel in the development of these statements as critical if they are to provide meaning for the members.

RCFD senior officers should review their communication and human resource management practices, particularly in the area of employee involvement and participation. The results of the surveys indicated that rank and file personnel are not currently being included in discussions on the future of the department. The study also identified that rank and file personnel are willing to participate in the planning process. Research clearly indicated that involvement by all members of an organization in the strategic planning process is vital to achieving long-term organizational success.

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APPENDIX A

STRATEGIC PLANNING SURVEY

Instructions: Listed below, are questions and statements concerning strategic planning, vision and mission statements. Place an "X" in the appropriate box marked yes or no. Next to each statement you will find a number scale from 1-5. Please circle the number that best represents your opinion on each statement. The numbers indicate the following: 1, strongly agree. 2, somewhat agree. 3 agree. 4, somewhat disagree. 5 strongly disagree. This survey is voluntary and your name is not required, if you do not wish to participate please return the survey to me. Thank you for your participation.

1. Are you familiar with the department's mission statement?

YES

☐

NO

☐

2. Do you feel that a vision statement would provide you and the department with a sense of direction for the future?

YES

☐

NO

☐

3. You are included in discussions on the future direction of the department.

1 2 3 4 5

4. You would be willing to participate in the planning process if asked.

1 2 3 4 5

5. All personnel should have the opportunity to provide input on the development of mission and vision statements.

1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX B

STRATEGIC PLANNING SURVEY SENIOR OFFICERS

Instructions: Listed below, are questions and statements concerning strategic planning, vision and mission statements. Place an "X" in the appropriate box marked yes or no. Next to each statement you will find a number scale from 1-5. Please circle the number that best represents your opinion on each statement. The numbers indicate the following: 1, strongly agree. 2, somewhat agree. 3 agree. 4, somewhat disagree. 5 strongly disagree. This survey is voluntary and your name is not required, if you do not wish to participate please return the survey to me. Thank you for your participation.

1. Are you familiar with the department's mission statement?

YES

☐

NO

☐

2. Were you involved in the development of the department mission statement

YES

☐

NO

☐

3. Do you feel that a vision statement would provide you and the department with a sense of direction for the future?

YES

☐

NO

☐

4. Are you familiar with the concept of strategic planning?

YES

☐

NO

☐

5. A strategic plan is necessary for the department's future success.

1 2 3 4 5

6. Rank and file personnel should be involved in the planning process.

1 2 3 4 5

7. Rank and file personnel should have input into the development of mission and vision statements.

1 2 3 4 5

8. You include rank and file personnel in discussions on the future direction of the department

1 2 3 4 5